

EAST FLORIDA
IN THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

BURTON BARRS

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EAST FLORIDA IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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Sons of the American Revolution


JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA
GUILD PRESS

1932

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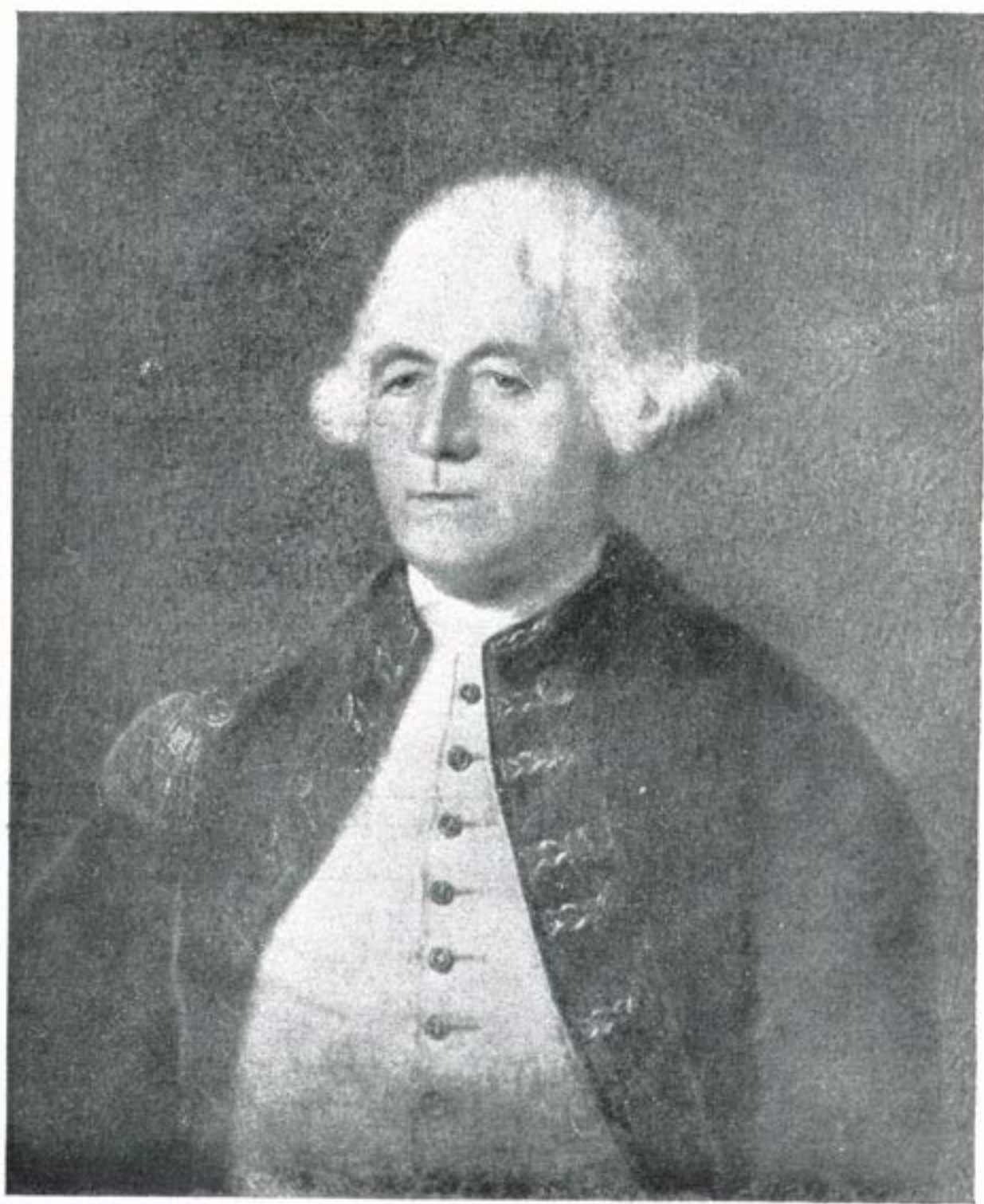
GUILD PRESS

133 East Forsyth Street
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

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AUGUSTIN PREVOST, British Commandant of East Florida, was a soldier of distinction long prior to the American Revolution. A native of Switzerland, he entered the British Army, saw action against the French on the continent, and was wounded at Fontenoy. When the Royal American Regiment was formed he was commissioned a Major in that organization. He fought under Wolfe at the siege of Quebec and was wounded in the head. The picture shows the scar on his forehead where the skull was trepanned. He was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel, took a battalion to the West Indies, and played a distinguished part in the capture of Martinique and Havana. His part in the American Revolution is briefly described in the text. Probably his greatest claim to fame is his successful defense of Savannah against the attack by Lincoln and d'Estaing. His eldest son served in the "Royal Americans," was made Governor-General of Canada and was created a baronet.



AUGUSTIN PREVOST

FOREWORD

This treatise is a revision of a paper which I prepared for the Jacksonville Historical Society the early part of this year. When I had selected my subject and had begun my work, I was most agreeably surprised to find that the entire period of the British occupation of Florida had been the subject of a most able work within the last two years by a distinguished research professor of Ohio State University, Professor Wilbur Henry Siebert, Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Professor Siebert wrote his monumental history, "Loyalists in East Florida," for the Florida State Historical Society, compiling an enormous mass of material from a number of almost inaccessible sources from which he extracted his narrative.

In preparing this paper, I examined a great number of books and documents, which are listed in the bibliography at the end of this booklet, but the bulk of what I have written was taken from sources indicated by Professor Siebert's book, condensed and restated by me. In assembling this material, I have had the very courteous assistance of Mr. Joseph F. Marron and Mr. Carl Bohnenberger of the Jacksonville Public Library. They, in turn, had the kind cooperation of Dr. James A. Robertson, Executive Secretary of the Florida State Historical Society, in obtaining books from the Library of Congress. The late Mr. Arthur T. Williams, President of the Florida Historical Society, Mrs. Garrett Porter, Assistant Secretary of the Florida Historical Society, and Mr. Herbert Lamson, Ex-President of the Jacksonville Historical Society, were also very helpful. Mr. William G. F. Wallace drew the excellent map, which will be found on pages 18 and 19.

BURTON BARRS.

Jacksonville, Florida,
September, 1932.

CHAPTER I.

THE BRITISH IN FLORIDA.

The average American when speaking of the American Colonies, refers only to those which revolted and became the thirteen original states of the union. After a little thought, he will recall that Canada also was British, but generally he will have completely forgotten those other British colonies, the Floridas.

And even the historically minded individual, who knows that Florida was under British rule for some twenty years, from 1763 to 1784, knows very little beyond that bare fact. And yet there are intensely interesting historical facts about that period. There were numerous raids into Florida by American troops from Georgia, and fighting took place all the way from the St. Marys River, which is the southern boundary of Georgia, to the St. Johns River. Fighting occurred on the St. Marys River, on Nassau River, on Trout Creek, and on the site of the city of Jacksonville, when the British troops were driven back across the St. Johns River and six of them were captured at Cowford. Warships of the British Royal Navy operated on the St. Johns River. Sea fights occurred off the Florida coast time and time again.

There were several invasions of Florida, not only by Georgia militia, but also by troops of the Continental Line. The failure of those expeditions is one of the great tragedies of Florida's history, as will be later pointed out. Loyalists flocked to Florida from Georgia and the Carolinas as well as from other colonies further north. These were organized into regiments in St. Augustine which fought for England throughout the Revolution, some of them laying down their arms at Yorktown when Cornwallis surrendered. A brother of the King, George III, was an officer on duty at St. Augustine. Florida troops at different times invaded Georgia and captured Fort McIntosh, Fort Howe and the then important port of Sunbury. This latter expedition then struck at Savannah, but reached that city after it had been captured by an expedition from New York. These troops from Florida continued to serve, as has been said, throughout the war. These are some of the high points of what we shall have to say about East Florida during the American Revolution.

When the Floridas (East and West) were ceded to Great Britain in 1763, in exchange for Cuba, the Spanish population, numbering about 7,000, left the country. It is said that the only Spaniards left, when the last transports weighed anchor, were three men who were in the woods trying to find the last of their horses. Of course there were some thousands of Indians and probably a handful of runaway slaves living in the wilds, but the entire territory was practically a howling wilderness.

West Florida extended from the Apalachicola River to the Mississippi, and it is not within the scope of this treatise. East

Florida comprised that part of the present State of Florida lying east of the Apalachicola River and also extended northward to the Altamaha River until a Royal Proclamation issued just after the exchange of flags added to Georgia that territory lying north of the St. Marys. The capital of East Florida was, of course, St. Augustine.

And so the English took over Florida—a wilderness, with two empty towns worth mentioning, St. Augustine and St. Marks, the latter of which was of little consequence, a few deserted forts here and there, a number of deserted plantations, and horse-trails for roads.

General James Grant, a hearty Scotchman, the first British Governor, arrived with his staff and a number of soldiers and settlers and there was almost immediately fair promise of progress and development. The King's Road was built by subscription of a number of public spirited gentlemen, from New Smyrna by way of St. Augustine and the Cowford (now Jacksonville) to the Altamaha River, some fifty miles north of the Georgia line. Immigration was for the first time invited and settlers were encouraged. In 1767 Dr. Andrew Turnbull formed the New Smyrna colony of some 1500 people. Numerous land grants were made by the King and plantations appeared all along the northern part of the east coast of Florida and along the St. Marys River, the Nassau River and the St. Johns River. Missions were built and trading posts were established, and barter with the Indians quickly grew up. Soon Florida was beginning to supply many of its own needs for provisions and to export considerable quantities of furs, lumber of various kinds, turpentine, resin, tar, indigo, rice, oranges, coffee, molasses, tobacco and various other commodities.

Governor Grant returned to England in 1771 and Lieutenant-Governor John Moultrie, a brother of General William Moultrie of South Carolina, was acting Governor until the arrival of Governor Patrick Tonyn who was sent out in 1774. This energetic man, Colonel Patrick Tonyn, was Governor of East Florida throughout the American Revolution and until the British evacuation in 1784. Despite his faults and mistakes, he was undeniably a remarkable man. He had fought on the continent of Europe as a Captain of Dragoons under Frederick the Great and was a Lieutenant-Colonel in the British Army when he was sent here as Governor.

The Governor had a council of twelve members to advise and assist him in ruling the colony. One of the members of this body was Captain Frederick George Mulcaster, the engineer at St. Augustine, who has been mentioned as being a brother of the King, George III. His eldest son was born in St. Augustine.

Another member of the Council was William Drayton, who shortly came into conflict with Governor Tonyn, and whom Tonyn suspected, probably correctly, of being in sympathy with the American Revolution, which soon was brewing.

Besides the Council, the Governor was authorized to establish an elective general assembly, but he did not see fit to do so until near the close of the Revolution.



PATRICK TONYN

CHAPTER II.

THE REVOLUTION BEGINS.

When Governor Tonyn arrived in St. Augustine the revolutionary spirit was becoming very prevalent in the colonies north of Florida. The Floridians, most of whom were newcomers from England and Scotland and the recent recipients of land grants from the King, were quite generally intensely loyal to the throne. The inhabitants numbered at that time, about 1,000 whites and 3,000 negroes. The new Governor invited the Loyalists of the other colonies to come to Florida and take shelter under the British flag. This invitation was soon accepted by thousands of "Tories," and the loyalty of the colony to the mother country was greatly intensified. When news of the signing of the Declaration of Independence was received at St. Augustine, John Adams and John Hancock were burned in effigy in the plaza.

The first act of hostility against East Florida was the boarding of the English brigantine "Betsy" just outside the St. Augustine bar by a South Carolina sloop, the "Commerce," which carried off a large quantity of gunpowder, which was on its way to the garrison of St. Augustine. A British armed vessel

was sent in pursuit of the South Carolina ship, but without success.

Shortly thereafter General Gage, the British commander at Boston, called on Governor Tonyn for a detachment of sixty men of the 14th Regiment at St. Augustine to be sent to Virginia to aid Lord Dunmore who had been "insolently threatened" by the people of that colony. The next month, Dunmore was calling for the entire regiment, the strength of which was 322 officers and men, but Tonyn and his council had heard rumors of a possible invasion of Florida and decided that the detachment of sixty men was all that could be spared pending the arrival at St. Augustine of three companies of the 16th Regiment from Pensacola. The sixty men were sent, and shortly thereafter an additional detachment went to Virginia, reducing the strength of the regiment nearly one-half. The troops remaining in East Florida were stationed at St. Augustine, New Smyrna, Matanzas, The Cowford, the Lookout Tower on Anastasia Island and along the St. Johns River. Shortly thereafter, detachments were posted at Picolata and St. Marks. The Cowford detachment occupied Fort San Nicholas, the site of which is in the old Merrill-Stevens shipyard, in South Jacksonville. The location has been marked by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Loyalist refugees were now pouring into Florida, singly and in groups. The bulk of them located in St. Augustine and along the St. Johns River. Tonyn writes that East Florida is "becoming an asylum to the friends of the Constitution," meaning, of course, the English Constitution. His invitation to Loyalists was posted in Charleston, Savannah and probably in other towns.

Some of these newcomers were people of considerable prominence. Among them was Colonel John Stuart, who was Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern District, a position of great importance in those days; there were also Thomas Browne, a large planter on the Savannah River, and the redoubtable Daniel McGirth,* both of whom had prominent parts in the later developments of the Revolution as organizers and officers of the "East Florida Rangers." Browne had been given a coat of tar and feathers by the Liberty Boys of Augusta, and McGirth, a scout in the American Army, had been court-martialed after a row with an officer who had taken McGirth's favorite mare, Gray Goose. McGirth escaped, and with his brother and Gray Goose, made his way to Florida.

Governor Tonyn, meanwhile, was doing everything possible to prepare for the defense of East Florida. Major Furlong was instructed to employ as many soldiers as possible in repairing and improving the defenses of St. Augustine. Incoming ships were searched for arms and armed men. Information was compiled as to the number of men able to bear arms. The Indians were invited to do their hunting in localities not too far distant for them to be available for fighting if needed. Plans were made for organizing the manpower of the province into militia, both infantry and cavalry. Correspondence with rebels was forbidden, and Chief Justice Drayton, who had been

*DANIEL MCGIRTH, an officer in the East Florida Rangers, was one of the worst characters of his time. He fought throughout the war on the British side, but was as distinguished for his pillaging and plundering as for his personal bravery. After the war he became definitely an outlaw, stealing negroes and cattle from Americans and Spaniards alike. He was finally captured and imprisoned for five years, after which he returned to his native state of South Carolina, according to Lorenzo Sabine, in his "Biographical Sketches," "ruined in health, reputation and estate."

McGirth's Creek (erroneously spelled), in Jacksonville, is named for him on account of his exploit in escaping from a posse by swimming his horse across the creek.

corresponding with his close relative, William Henry Drayton of South Carolina, was suspended from office by the Council.

This suspension of Drayton precipitated a bitter controversy between Governor Tonyn and his supporters on one hand and the Anti-Tonyn party, which was led by Drayton and Dr. Turnbull. The Anti-Tonyn group met at Wood's Tavern and adopted an address to the King, reflecting upon the Governor's administration, and Tonyn countered with another address to the King signed by himself and his friends charging his opponents with furnishing military intelligence to the American revolutionists, and specifically naming Turnbull and Drayton as "Patriots for the cause of America."

Drayton and Turnbull had gone to England to present their case and soon returned with letters reproving Tonyn, removing Drayton's suspension and instructing Tonyn to use his best endeavors to promote the growth and advantage of the Turnbull colony. However, the colony at New Smyrna had already been broken up, principally through Tonyn's efforts.



CHARLES LEE

CHARLES LEE, Major General in the Continental Army, who projected the first attempt to invade Florida, was at that time second only to General Washington in rank. He was captured by the British in 1776 in New Jersey, and was exchanged in 1778. At the battle of Monmouth he nearly caused the loss of the battle by disobeying Washington's orders. For this he was tried by court-martial and suspended from the army. Later, Congress dismissed him from the service.

CHAPTER III.

MOULTRIE'S EXPEDITION.

Raids by Georgia troops on the plantations along the St. Marys became more serious and in June, 1776, Tonyn called on Thomas Browne and Daniel McGirth to organize the East Florida Rangers. Browne was commissioned Lieutenant-Colonel and placed in command. Daniel McGirth and his brother also received commissions. Soon thereafter, Colonel Augustin Prevost, an able officer, of whom we shall hear more, arrived in St. Augustine with nine companies of the 60th Regiment, "The Royal Americans"*. Fresh depredations occurring on the St. Marys, the settlers near the border were ordered to drive their cattle across the St. Johns River, and Tonyn sent several small boats with a force of regulars, Rangers and Indians to reinforce the outpost and the armed schooner "St. John" of the Royal Navy, which was already on that river.

*THE ROYAL AMERICAN REGIMENT, or 60th Foot, was organized as a direct result of Braddock's defeat on the Monongahela. That debacle clearly demonstrated to the British government the ineffectiveness of European tactics in forest warfare, and the need for a body of soldiers skilled in the arts of the woodsman, "combining," as Lewis Butler says, "the qualities of the scout with the discipline of the trained soldier." To meet this need, The Royal American Regiment was raised, the enlisted men being Americans, the officers being mostly American and British, but with a considerable number of officers from the continent of Europe. There were few Americans in the 3rd and 4th Battalions which were sent to Florida, these units being filled up with recruits mostly from England and Germany. The regiment soon adopted a service uniform of neutral colors instead of the typical British uniform with a red coat, and the rifle as its weapon instead of the smooth-bore.

The regiment was afterwards named The 60th Rifles, and is now called "The King's Royal Rifle Corps." It has served with distinction under Wolfe in Canada, under Prevost and others in the American Revolution, and in almost every part of Europe, Asia and Africa where Great Britain has fought, down to the present time.

It is considered a Corps d' Elite and its members are very proud of its record, its green uniform, and the fact that its honorary Colonel-in-Chief is His Majesty King George V.

The outpost and the little flotilla were attacked by three armed vessels from Georgia in August, 1776, and compelled to retire, and the inhabitants of Amelia Island had to flee to the mainland.

Late in the summer, a raid by an American party from Georgia on the two plantations of Captain Benjamin Dodd, one on the St. Marys River and the other on Trout Creek, resulted in the defeat and withdrawal of the British outpost of 100 officers and men in that vicinity to the south side of the St. Johns River. It is reasonable to suppose that there were a number of casualties on both sides, but the books merely mention that six of the British were captured before the crossing was effected. Presumably the others took refuge in Fort San Nicholas.

Shortly after the Declaration of Independence was signed, Governor Tonyn became conscious of a serious threat from the north. He called on the Creek and Seminole Indians for help, and issued a proclamation requiring all loyal subjects of the King to enlist in one or the other of the provincial military organizations.

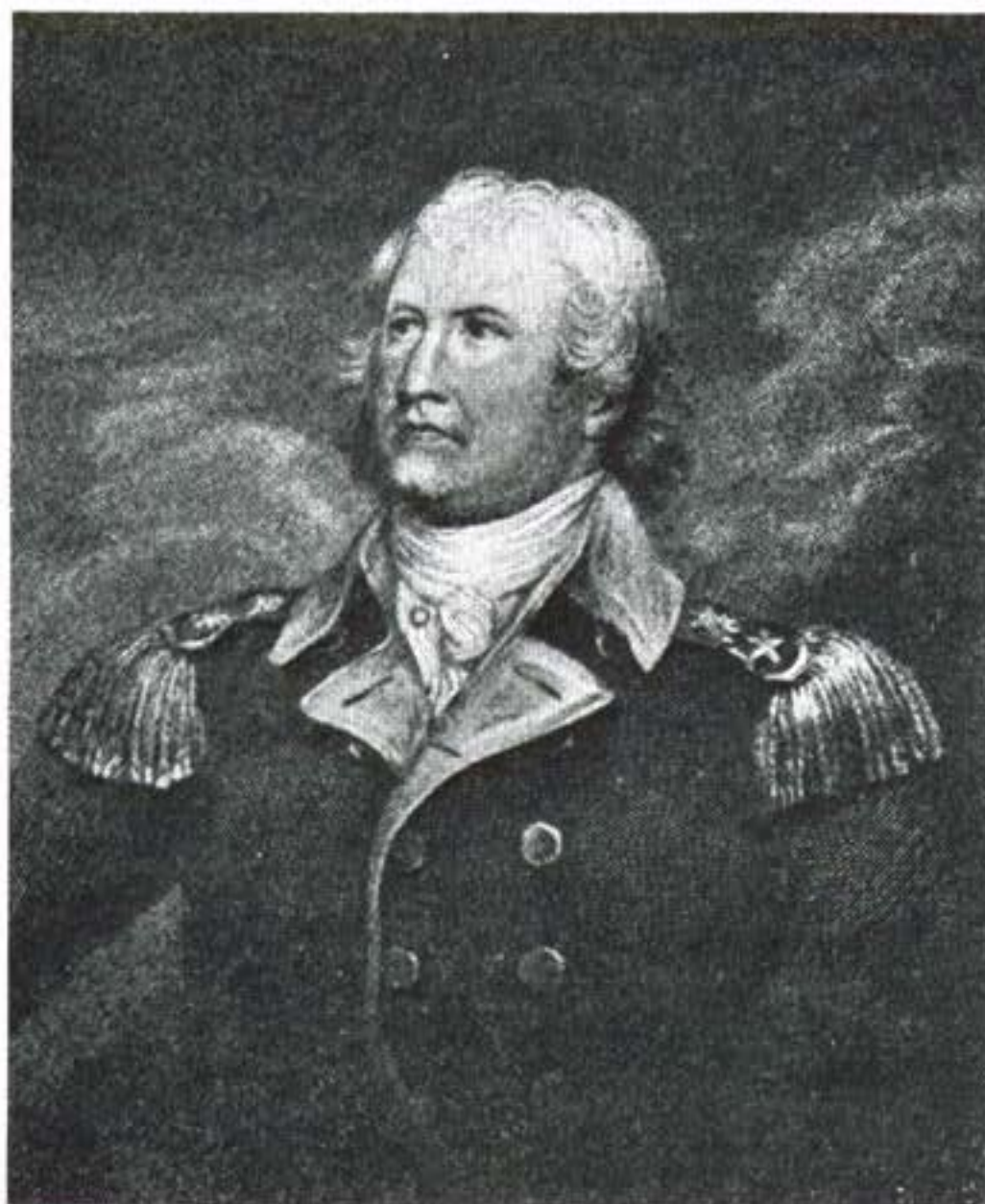
Tonyn's fears were well-founded. In the summer of 1776, a committee of prominent Georgians prevailed upon General Charles Lee, the American general in command at Charleston, to secure the approval of the Continental Congress for an invasion of Florida. The purpose of the invasion was to capture St. Augustine or failing that, to drive the British within the walls of the city and to prevent them from communicating with the Indians who might then be won over to the American side.

A reconnaissance in force under Colonel McIntosh of Geor-

gia with a part of his regiment attacked the British fort on the St. Marys River maintained by Jermyn Wright and Charles Wright, brothers of the Royal Governor of Georgia, Sir James Wright. The casualties were not heavy, the British losing one man killed and nine captured.

General Lee assembled his forces at Savannah, 260 soldiers of the Continental Line, and a contingent of Virginia and North Carolina militia. While preparations were being made, however, the Continental Congress summoned General Lee and he went to Philadelphia, leaving orders for the Virginia and North Carolina troops to follow him. The command of the expedition then devolved upon Colonel William Moultrie, a brother of that same John Moultrie, who has been mentioned as Royal Lieutenant-Governor of East Florida. The little force started south, but soon encountered trouble. The hot summer sun and the swamps of the Ogeechee made the march very difficult, and fever and camp sicknesses, the bane of every army until modern times, attacked the men. There was not a medicine chest in the little army and the death rate climbed to fourteen or fifteen a day. The expedition got no further south, than Sunbury, some twenty-five miles south of Savannah—not even a good start. So ended the first serious effort by the Americans to invade Florida.

Meanwhile, Governor Tonyn had been looking to his defenses, both by land and sea. The schooner "St. John" of the Royal Navy, and the sloops "Rebecca" and "Tuncastle" had been ordered to the St. Johns River to cooperate with the British troops, in opposing the American army. The little flotilla was not to be put to the test, however, as Colonel Moultrie's force had turned back at Sunbury.



WILLIAM MOULTRIE

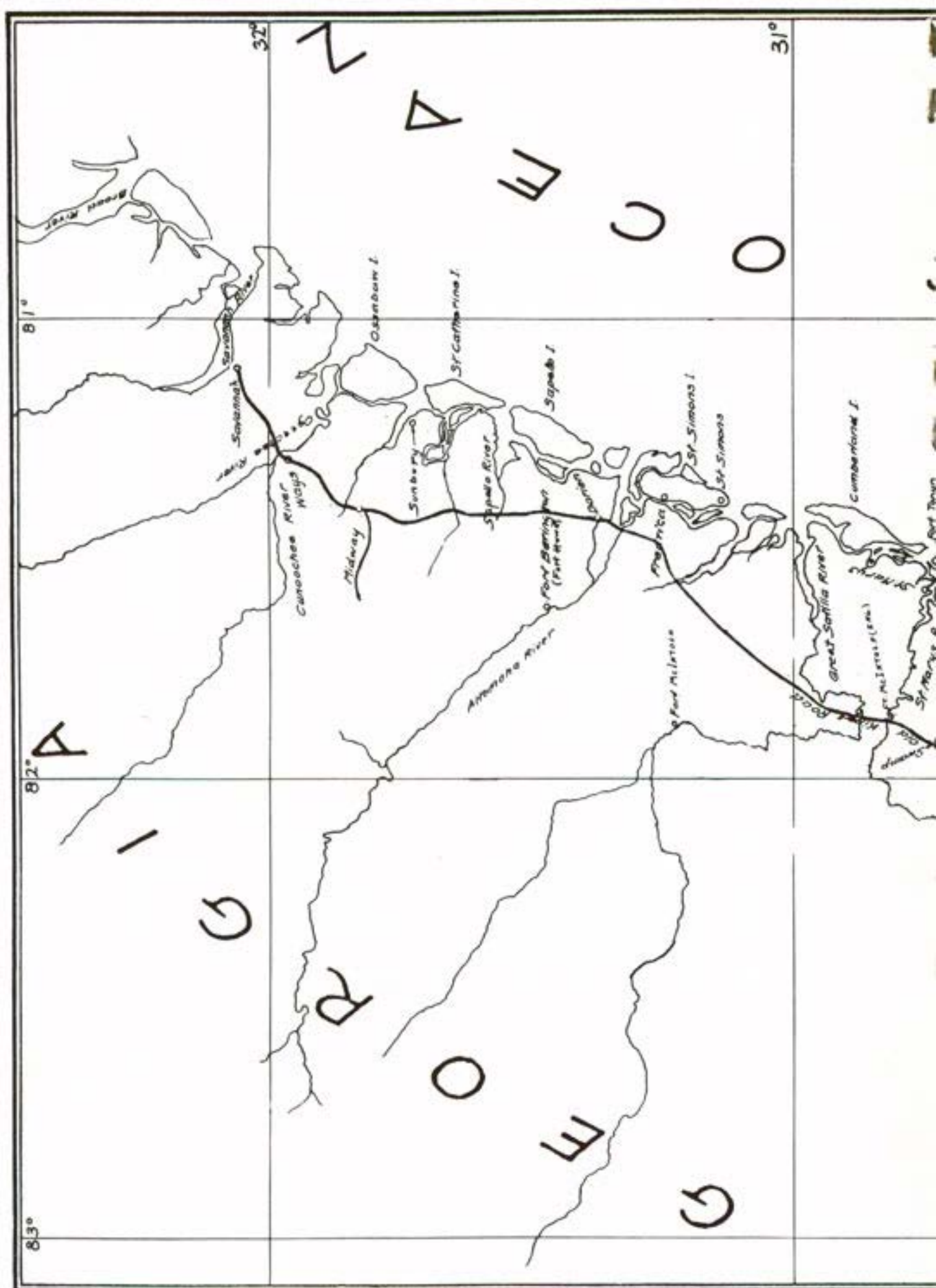
WILLIAM MOULTRIE, Colonel in the Continental Army, commander of the disastrous expedition for the invasion of Florida, in the summer of 1776, had already won renown by his defense of Charleston against the attack of a British fleet under Sir Peter Parker and Sir Henry Clinton in the spring of that year. He was promoted to Brigadier General and again distinguished himself by repulsing the British attack on Charleston in 1779. The next year, however, the city was captured, and Moultrie was one of those taken prisoner. He was exchanged in 1782 and promoted to Major General. After the war, he was twice Governor of South Carolina. Fort Moultrie in Charleston harbor is named for him.

CHAPTER IV.

FUSER CAPTURES FT. MCINTOSH.

But the doughty Loyalists of Florida were not content to remain on the defensive, and the opening of the year 1777 saw a retaliatory expedition being organized for the invasion of Georgia. This force, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis V. Fuser, consisted of 500 British regulars, 100 East Florida Rangers, under Colonels Browne and McGirth, a battery of fieldpieces and about 400 Creek Indians. Moving north from St. Augustine by the King's Road (now State Road Number Four), the little army passed through Cowford, and, on reaching the St. Marys River left Captain George McIntosh and a garrison of 50 men at the house of Captain Taylor, which they fortified and named Ft. McIntosh, probably as a bit of humor, as they were marching to attack the American fort of that name.

The American Ft. McIntosh was located on the northeast side of the Satilla River, about halfway between the present towns of Waycross and Jesup. It was a stockade work, one





hundred feet square and had a bastion in each corner and a block house in the center. It was garrisoned by 60 Continentals under the command of Captain Richard Winn.

The Indians and the East Florida Rangers were the first to reach the fort. They drove in the garrison and launched an attack which lasted for five hours. Then Colonel Browne demanded an unconditional surrender with the alternative of death for the entire garrison. Captain Winn's reply was that he was "bound in honor not to comply." The attack was renewed and continued until late afternoon. The Americans had sustained a number of casualties and the wounded were suffering greatly for lack of a surgeon to treat them. As night came on, the Rangers withdrew a short distance, but left a guard around the fort. As soon as it was dark, Captain Winn sent a mounted man to Fort Howe, about twenty-five miles to the northeast, with a request for reinforcements, stating that he would hold out as long as possible, and that he would sally out upon the enemy as soon as he received a signal that the reinforcing party had attacked the British. But the garrison at Ft. Howe was unable to render any assistance, as there were only forty men fit for duty at that post.

During the night the British regulars arrived and Colonel Fuser took command. The attack was renewed at nine o'clock in the morning, the Americans hoping for the reinforcements that had been requested. At three o'clock Fuser made another demand for the fort's surrender and Winn, to gain time, wasted two hours in consultation. The time within which help should be expected having now elapsed, Winn made an estimate of the situation and found that his ammunition was nearly exhausted and that his provisions would not suffice for more than one

day. He concluded that it was best to make terms while he still had means of defense rather than to be reduced to the necessity of an unconditional surrender. He therefore conferred with Colonel Fuser between the fort and the British lines and articles of capitulation were agreed upon, with the exception of one term. Winn insisted "that for the further safety of the prisoners against Indian treachery, a complete company of British regulars should escort them to the Altamaha, opposite to Fort Howe, and that the British commander should be responsible for the conduct of the Indians and Florida Rangers toward the prisoners." Fuser refused to agree to this article, saying that he would only be responsible for the conduct of the British regulars, and Winn broke off the parley, saying that he did not despair of defending the fort until he was reinforced. He returned to the fort, acquainted his men with the situation, and they grimly prepared for a renewal of hostilities. Fuser, however, reopened the negotiations and agreed to Winn's requirement, and the garrison marched out and laid down their arms.

Under the terms of the capitulation, Lieutenants John Milton and William Caldwell were taken as hostages and the other prisoners were paroled not to take up arms in the American cause until regularly exchanged. Milton and Caldwell were confined in the fort at St. Augustine for nine months, until exchanged.

The escort, which started toward Ft. Howe with the Americans, soon began to dwindle away, and by ten o'clock there were no British regulars left. Knowing the Indian character as he did, Captain Winn suspected that his men, without protection and with no means of defense, were about to be the

victims of Indian treachery. He aroused his men and took a route to Ft. Howe through swamps, bays and ponds, about thirty-five miles, which had probably never been traversed before by any white man.*

Colonel Fuser occupied Ft. McIntosh, but three days later, hearing that an American army was on the march to intercept him, he burned the fort and returned to St. Augustine, taking with him, however, 2000 head of cattle, which had been brought in by the East Florida Rangers, who were experts in such matters. Despite his withdrawal, the American planters as far north as the Sapello River, sixty miles north of the border, deserted their farms, fearing the advance of the entire army of East Florida.

*The British account is different in a number of important details. It touches very lightly on the fight which the garrison put up, and states that there were 300 American troops encamped in a swamp within four miles of the fort, and that the British escort marched with the prisoners until they came to this place, and they were then "sent to join them," and that Winn's men, magnifying the strength of the British force, the Americans broke camp and retreated.

CHAPTER V.

ELBERT AND BAKER INVADE FLORIDA.

There now appeared the threat of another invasion of Florida from Georgia. Button Gwinnett, who had been elected President of Georgia by the Council of Safety, planned this invasion and sent Colonel Samuel Elbert* with two battalions of the Continental Line and Colonel John Baker of the Georgia militia on the march to St. Augustine. This expedition caused considerable perturbation among the Floridians, especially among those who distrusted Governor Tonyn's ability to cooperate with the military. A meeting of some of the most prominent and influential men of the Colony proposed to Tonyn that he capitulate with the Americans, agreeing that Florida would assume an attitude of neutrality in the war provided the Americans would not molest this province. Tonyn argued, however, that having the St. Johns River as a strong defensive line, the Floridians and the King's troops could prevent the patriot army from crossing it.

Elbert's Continentals marched south from Savannah about twenty-five miles to Sunbury and then took boats to the St. Marys River. He was to be joined by Colonel Baker and his force of mounted militia at Sawpit Bluff, eight miles north of the mouth of the St. Johns River.

*SAMUEL ELBERT, Colonel in the Continental Army, who participated in two of the invasions of Florida, took a gallant part in the later events of the Revolution. He commanded a regiment in the defense of Savannah, when it was besieged by Campbell. He was captured at the battle of Briar Creek when the Americans were overwhelmingly defeated. Jones says, in his *History of Georgia*, "The only ray of light amid the gloom of the whole affair is shed by the gallantry of Colonel Elbert and his command." He served one term as Governor of Georgia, from 1785 to 1786.

Baker's militia, which only reached a strength of 109 men, marched overland by way of Ft. Howe, and although impeded by high water and a brush with a band of Indians, he reached the place of rendezvous at the appointed time, May 12th, but found that Elbert had not arrived. He sent his brother, Major William Baker, with forty men to reconnoitre the country as far as Cowford, now Jacksonville. This patrol found that the British knew of their approach and were preparing to meet them.

Three days later a party of Indians stole forty horses from the American camp at Sawpit Bluff. In a skirmish which cost Baker two wounded, the horses were recovered and one Indian killed.

Two more days elapsed and still Colonel Elbert had not arrived. Baker's little force was now in a precarious position and he decided to move to a more favorable place from which he could withdraw if attacked by a superior force. Meanwhile, Major James Marc Prevost crossed the St. Johns at the Cowford with 100 regulars and some Rangers and Indians and marched to Rolfe's Saw Mill (11 miles due north of the present city of Jacksonville), where he encamped. During the night one of the East Florida Rangers located the Americans and brought Major Prevost a horse's ear as proof that he had found them.

At daybreak, May 17th, the Indians and Rangers came upon the Americans at Thomas' Swamp just west of where the Atlantic Coastal Highway now crosses Nassau River. They attacked and all but about fifty of the Americans fled. Colonel Baker and the remainder of his men fought bravely for some

time, but when Major Prevost advanced with his British regulars in three columns with fixed bayonets and turned Baker's flank, the Americans were compelled to mount their horses and retreat under a galling fire. Eight Americans were killed, nine wounded, and thirty-one were captured, including two captains. Colonel Baker and the remainder of his force escaped. Then there occurred one of the most horrible events of the war. The Indians fell upon the captives and murdered all but sixteen, who were saved with great difficulty by Major Prevost and the regulars.

A few days later, Elbert's Continentals landed on the north end of Amelia Island near the present site of Fernandina. A patrol was sent to the south end of the island and, in a skirmish with a party of British troops, which advanced to meet them, Lieutenant Ward was killed and two of his party were wounded. In retaliation, Elbert ordered every house on the island to be burned and all of the cattle destroyed.

Elbert did not penetrate into the interior very far. The inland passage was guarded by two armed vessels. St. Johns Bluff, on the south side of the St. Johns River, five miles from the sea, was fortified with cannon and there were two warships on the St. Johns. Elbert's force was suffering from the heat and lack of provisions. He believed that he could not advance into East Florida without the British "having timely notice" from friends among the Americans. So he contented himself with sailing up the St. Marys, searching for foraging parties of the Floridians, keeping them for a time out of Georgia, and in a few weeks, abandoning the expedition and marching back to Savannah while his ships returned to Sunbury.



ROBERT HOWE

ROBERT HOWE, Major-General in the Continental Army, commander of the last and most formidable invasion of Florida, commanded the American forces at Savannah when that city was captured by Colonel Campbell. As a result of Howe's withdrawal from Savannah, a court of inquiry was convened, but he was acquitted "with highest honors." Further criticism caused a duel between Howe and General Gadsden, but the only damage done in this affray was a trivial wound in Gadsden's ear.

Howe was transferred to the North and took part in the battles of Verplanck's Point and Stony Point. He was placed in command of West Point but shortly returned to the field. He was a member of the court-martial that tried Major Andre. After the war he returned to his plantation in North Carolina.

CHAPTER VI.

BROWNE CAPTURES FORT HOWE.

There now ensued a period during which military operations in Florida were on a very small scale. The government busied itself improving its relations with the Indians and numerous raids were made across the Georgia line for the seizure of cattle, which were greatly needed by the Floridians. Loyalists in Georgia and South Carolina kept up a constant correspondence with the government of East Florida. Browne's East Florida Rangers now consisted of four companies, and these troops were very busy "collecting" cattle in Georgia and enticing deserters from the American army into Florida. It was largely a time of "watchful waiting" on both sides of the Georgia line, each colony expecting an invasion from the other, marked however, by the capture of Fort Barrington, now named Fort Howe, by Colonel Browne with his East Florida Rangers and a party of Indians.

We have only a very sketchy account of this affair, as there was considerable jealousy between the officers of the regular British army, one of whom wrote the account, and the officers of the East Florida Rangers, who were, of course, provincials.

We do know, however, that one American officer and three enlisted men were killed and the remainder of the garrison of Fort Howe, two officers and seventeen enlisted men, were captured and taken to St. Augustine. The British lost one officer, killed.

Meanwhile, Loyalists from the other colonies continued to pour into East Florida. Many of these received land grants and undertook the cultivation of the soil. Many more, however, took up arms for the King's cause. In April, 1777, about 350 South Carolinians from the vicinity of the Broad and Saluda Rivers, arrived in St. Augustine. These men, most of whom were called Palatines, their ancestors having come to America from the German Palatinate, organized four companies of infantry and two troops of rifle dragoons, under authority of the Commandant of East Florida, Augustin Prevost, who had now been promoted to Brigadier-General. These newcomers took the name of the South Carolina Royalists, and they were assigned to duty on the St. Johns River.

Shortly thereafter, another group of Loyalists from the Ninety-Six District of South Carolina arrived in East Florida. These were led by Colonel Scophol of the South Carolina militia and were known as "Scopholites." They numbered between four and five hundred men, including a number of Georgians who joined them near Augusta.

North Carolina also furnished a large quota of Loyalist immigrants to Florida and Lieutenant-Colonel John Hamilton, who had come to St. Augustine from Halifax, North Carolina, organized the Royal North Carolina Regiment, mostly of refugees from that state, but partly of Loyalists from other

colonies. This regiment consisted of eight companies and numbered 460 men. It is said that 7,000 Loyalists came to Florida during the year 1778.

In the spring of 1778, the long expected invasion of Florida by Brigadier-General Robert Howe moved south by water. At Frederica, just north of where Brunswick, Georgia, now is, part of the American force on board three galleys, the "Washington," the "Lee" and the "Bulloch," surprised and captured three ships of the East Florida navy. These were the armed ship "Hinchenbrook," the sloop "Rebecca" of which we have previously heard, and an American brig which had been captured by the "Hinchenbrook."

The honors of the naval warfare were not all with the Americans, however, for at about the same time three other Florida ships, the "Perseus," the "Daphne" and the "Galatea," captured a number of prizes, including several French merchant ships which had on board the Chevalier De Bretigny, sixteen of his officers, and two hundred of his enlisted men, who were on their way to join Washington's army. These prisoners of war were brought into St. Augustine and confined in the state house.



CHARLES COTESWORTH PINCKNEY

CHARLES COTESWORTH PINCKNEY, commander of one of the regiments of Continentals in Howe's invasion of Florida, was Aide-de-Camp to Washington at the battles of Brandywine and Germantown. Like Moultrie, he was taken prisoner when the British captured Charleston in 1780 and was held until the end of the war. As a member of the Constitutional Convention he introduced the clause prohibiting any religious test as a qualification for public office. At different times he was tendered appointments as Secretary of War and Secretary of State, but declined them both. In 1796 he was appointed Minister to France, but the Directory refused to receive him. When it was suggested that France might make peace upon the payment of a sum of money, he made the famous reply, "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute!" He was a Federalist candidate for President in 1800, 1804, and 1808.

CHAPTER VII.

GENERAL HOWE'S INVASION.

General Howe's army was now approaching the border. Before they reached the Satilla River, they had detailed information about the Loyalist forces and their disposition. They were informed that the Floridians had 300 men on the St. Marys River, 350 Scopholites at the head of Trout Creek (near the present town of Dinsmore), 60 men with two 24-pounders on the St. Johns River, 320 men in the garrison at St. Augustine and 80 further south, and that besides these, there were about 100 militia and 150 Indians available for the defense of the province. They also knew of the dispute which had arisen over the authority of Colonel Browne of the East Florida Rangers to give orders to officers of lesser rank in the British regular army.

General Prevost's plan of defense was to make no resistance north of the St. Marys River, but to oppose the passage of that river with Colonel Browne's East Florida Rangers and the South Carolina Royalists under the command of General Prevost's brother, Major James Marc Prevost. If necessary, this force was to fall back to the St. Johns River. Besides the troops on the north side of the St. Johns, there was a small fortification there, an armed vessel was in the river and on the south side were two detachments of regulars with artillery.

Ten miles south of the river was a position to be held by the entire garrison of St. Augustine with the exception of a small detail of men, who were to be left in the fort.

Howe's force totalled about 3000 men. He had two regiments of Continentals, commanded by Colonels Samuel Elbert of Georgia and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina, respectively, and there were about 1200 Georgia militia under the personal command of Governor Houstoun. The latter reached the St. Marys River at a point west of the British Fort McIntosh.

General Prevost advanced to Cowford and sent Colonel Browne and his Rangers and a number of Indians to the St. Marys River and they occupied the British Fort McIntosh. They had hardly arrived there, when they were practically surrounded by the Georgia militia, but they managed to escape into the cabbage swamp a short distance south of the St. Marys, and the Americans were unable to ferret them out.

Meanwhile General Prevost had sent forward his brother, Major James Marc Prevost, with 450 regulars and South Carolina Royalists to Alligator Bridge, some eighteen miles due north of the present city of Jacksonville. The Georgia militia were about seventeen miles further to the northwest. From Alligator Bridge, 200 Regulars were sent forward to rescue Colonel Browne and his Rangers from the swamp, and after a slight brush with a column of Americans, this was effected. The Rangers came out of the swamp, although many of them had lost their rifles.

Meanwhile, on June 24th, General Howe's American Continentals had entered the Amelia Narrows, near the present site

of Fernandina, making a junction with an American fleet under Commodore Bowen. On account of wrangling by the East Florida officers and their men, a sufficient force could not be mustered to oppose the landing of the Americans and Lieutenant-Colonel Fuser, who had been sent forward to meet them, withdrew and fortified St. Johns Bluff. While the rescue of the East Florida Rangers was being effected, another detachment of British was sent by Major Prevost to disperse a party of American troops encamped at Nassau Bluff, on the north side of the Nassau River near its mouth. This having been accomplished, the British party returned to the camp at Alligator Bridge, reaching there at about the same time that the rescued Rangers did. As the Rangers were crossing the bridge into camp, a party of 300 American cavalry, which had been sent out by General Howe, fell upon them, shouting, "Down with the Tories!" The Rangers quickly formed and defended themselves until the British regulars could catch up their arms and relieve them.

The British camp was surrounded by a trench, and entanglements of logs and brush, which the Americans were unable to pass. There was a short but hot engagement, which lasted until Colonel Elijah Clarke, the American commander, was wounded. The loss of Colonel Clarke seemed to dishearten the Americans and they withdrew with a loss of three killed, nine wounded and one captured. The British lost one man killed and eight wounded. The British had been taken completely by surprise and if the Americans had pressed the assault, it is entirely possible that they would have achieved a victory. This skirmish occurred on June 30th, 1778.

The next day the British withdrew to a strong position on

Trout Creek, six miles north of the Cowford, leaving a few Indians to observe the Americans.

The American invasion had not been very much of a success. General Howe's army had lost a considerable number in killed, wounded and captured, but their heaviest losses had been due to sickness, more than half of the men being on the sick list and more than *five hundred* having died of disease. Moreover, there were hopeless factional differences among the officers. Governor Houstoun of Georgia insisted upon his constitutional right to command the militia and refused to obey General Howe. Commodore Bowen also insisted that the naval force was independent of the army. A council of war, which convened at Ft. Tonyn on July 11th, 1778, decided that the expedition should be abandoned. The army crossed the St. Marys and in a rear guard action with some of Prevost's men, two Americans were killed. So ended the last serious attempt of the Americans to invade Florida. There were a number of raids from the sea still to come, but so far as land warfare is concerned, the field of operations after 1778 was beyond the borders of Florida.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAPTURE OF SUNBURY AND SAVANNAH.

In the fall of that year, the British high command decided upon the reduction of Savannah and as a part of this operation the East Florida forces were ordered to make a diversion against Sunbury. Major James Marc Prevost marched from St. Augustine by land with 750 men. Presumably they followed the King's Road, that being the only practicable route. The cavalry was to move rapidly to the Sapello and await the infantry there. Prevost's detachment consisted of British regulars, the East Florida Rangers, the South Carolina Royalists and a number of Indians. At the same time, Lieutenant-Colonel Fuser moved north with 250 regulars in small boats up the inland channel. The two forces were to converge on Sunbury and capture the town, and at the same time two privateers, the "Spitfire" and the "Alligator," were to alarm the coast.

Prevost's force proceeded through the Georgia settlements plundering as they went. At Midway, about twenty-two miles southwest of Savannah, they encountered a small force of

Americans under the command of General James Screven. A brisk fight ensued and when Prevost's horse was shot from under him, it appeared that an American victory was imminent. He was uninjured, however, and mounting another horse, rallied his men and withstood the Americans' charge. The Patriot force was defeated and General Screven was fatally wounded and captured. Two American doctors were allowed to enter the British lines that night to attend him, but their efforts were unavailing and he expired after a few hours. His grave is to be seen in the famous Midway cemetery.* Fort Screven, near Savannah, is named for him. He must have been a first-rate fighting man, to die for his country as a Brigadier-General at the age of twenty-seven.

Prevost sent Daniel McGirth on a reconnaissance to Sunbury, and he found that Colonel Fuser had not arrived there, whereupon Prevost burned the Midway Meeting House and all of the other buildings there, and returned to Florida with a great quantity of booty, which he sold at St. Marys for £8,000.

Fuser landed a few miles south of Sunbury on the day of the fight at Midway and marched on the town. He sent a captain of the East Florida Rangers to make contact with Prevost, but was informed that Prevost had proceeded to the Ogeechee. The people of Sunbury had taken refuge in their little fort and when Fuser demanded its surrender, they replied, "Come and take it." To the complete astonishment of the Americans, Fuser did not storm the fort, but marched his men

*According to Jones (*History of Georgia*) the Congress of the United States provided for the erection of a monument to General Screven's memory. It has never been built. He says, "The obligation is as binding now as when first solemnly recognized."

back to their boats. When Fuser and Prevost reached the St. Johns River, each accused the other of responsibility for the failure of his own expedition.

Immediately, however, General Augustin Prevost undertook a new expedition to Sunbury and Savannah, which he led in person. He directed his brother and Colonel Fuser to join him at the south end of Cumberland Island, which is just north of the mouth of the St. Marys River. There he, himself, brought all of the troops of the St. Augustine garrison except a guard of four companies which was left in that city, and he brought also three companies of Royalist volunteers from New Jersey, which had been sent down from New York.

The plan was for him to reduce Sunbury and then march north and, acting in conjunction with an expedition, which was to come by sea from New York, capture Savannah.

This force of about 900 men moved north by the inland passage in small boats accompanied by a little flotilla of supply ships which skirted the coast and which sometimes had to make wide detours to escape American armed vessels. The troops several times were forced to subsist on a small supply of rice and on oysters which they found in bays and inlets. One group lived for three days upon an alligator and some Madeira wine from a ship which had been wrecked on the coast. However, when they reached Jekyll Island, they had a treat—horseflesh.

On January 7, 1779, Prevost reached Sunbury and invested the town. Major Lane, the American commander, refused to surrender, and General Prevost ordered his artillery to open

fire on the fort. After a short bombardment, the garrison of 210 officers and men surrendered. More than a hundred other prisoners were rounded up in the vicinity by the mounted Rangers.

Meanwhile, the expedition from New York had landed at Tybee Island and captured Savannah, and General Prevost proceeded to that city, leaving a garrison at Sunbury.* On reaching Savannah, General Prevost's contingent was given the name of the "Florida Brigade."

Shortly thereafter, Lieutenant-Colonel James Marc Prevost was made Lieutenant-Governor of Georgia, and he was Acting Governor during the prolonged absence of Governor Sir James Wright in England. He set up the Royal Government of Georgia again, and summoned James Robertson from St. Augustine to be his Attorney-General. At about the same time, his brother, Brigadier-General Augustin Prevost, was promoted to Major-General.

*Sunbury never recovered from the shock of the war. A thriving town, with a population estimated by Jones (*History of Georgia*) at about one thousand, it was a busy port and a worthy rival of Savannah. Now it is a "dead town" with nothing but memories of its early ambitions.

CHAPTER IX.

LATER OPERATIONS.

Georgia was now pretty well reduced, and Florida was reasonably tranquil throughout the remainder of the Revolution, except for the descents of privateers upon its coast and its shipping, and the constant fear of an attack by the Spaniards.* Colonel Fuser was sent back to St. Augustine as Commandant and he had a little garrison of 200 men, which was increased after a few months to 450.

The troops from Florida, the East Florida Rangers, the St. Augustine Grenadiers, the South Carolina Royalists, the Royal North Carolina Regiment and the Carolina King's Rangers, all of which were organized, armed, equipped, trained and sent out from Florida, as well as the regulars from the St. Augustine garrison, served throughout the war in Georgia, North and South Carolina and Virginia. Early in 1779, General Prevost, with his Florida troops and others, invaded South Carolina for the purpose of drawing General Lincoln out of Georgia. Hearing that Charleston was in a very defenseless condition, he decided to attempt its capture. He crossed the Ashley River and demanded the surrender of the city, but the demand being refused and Prevost finding that the American positions could not be taken without a disproportionate loss of men, he returned to Georgia. He completed the subjugation of that state, but shortly afterward became ill and returned to England.

Florida regiments were among those that successfully defended Savannah against the siege by General Lincoln and

*Great Britain was at war not only with the American colonies, but also with France, Spain and Holland.

Count d'Estaing. Others fought under Lord Rawdon at Hanging Rock; some saw action at Augusta, Briar Creek, and White House; others fought under Cornwallis at Camden, Musgrove Mills, Petersburg, and in most of his other battles down to and ending at Yorktown. Florida regiments twice defeated the redoubtable Francis Marion, once on the north side of the Cooper River and again at the Santee River. Most of the noted American commanders in the south, Francis Marion, Pickens, Sumter, Gates, Greene, Lafayette, and many others, came into conflict with some of the Florida regiments. And as has been said, a part of the Royal North Carolina Regiment was with Cornwallis when he surrendered at Yorktown.

At the end of the Revolution, Florida remained in British hands. The South Carolina Royalists, the Carolina King's Rangers, and the Royal North Carolina Regiment, all of which had been organized in Florida, as well as the North Carolina Highlanders, who had not, were sent to St. Augustine to be mustered out. The "Tories" of Georgia and the Carolinas flocked into the province. St. Augustine grew apace, but most of the post-war immigrants settled at St. Johns Bluff, or along the St. Johns River and Doctor's Lake. St. Johns Bluff soon had 300 houses, two taverns, a public house, a livery stable, a drygoods shop, a storehouse for coarse and wet goods, a hardware store, a physician, and even a lodge of Freemasons. A missionary conducted regular religious services there.

The influx of Loyalists increased the population of East Florida to more than 17,000 people, who fully expected Great Britain to retain the Floridas.

News that the Treaty of Paris provided for the cession of

the colony to Spain, was a severe blow to the British Floridians. The heartbreak of the Acadians pictured so poignantly by Longfellow's "Evangeline" was not greater than that of the Floridians. They pleaded and remonstrated with the British government in the most piteous terms, but to no avail.

Slowly and painfully the transfer was effected. Only about 450 whites and 200 negroes remained in Florida under the Spanish flag; Governor Tonyn estimated that over 4,000 people went to the Mississippi country; about 3,000 went to one or the other of the United States and the others went to the Bahamas, Dominica, Jamaica, Nova Scotia and various other places. Most of the whites who remained were Minorcans from Dr. Turnbull's New Smyrna Colony.

And so again, Florida was almost totally depopulated. Again it was a wild frontier with all the lawlessness of a frontier. Even the Creeks and Cherokees seriously considered going with the English. The Spaniards came in for about two score years, and in 1821 they left again, when Florida was ceded to the United States.

It is interesting to speculate upon what the effect upon Florida history would have been if one of the three invasions by the American Continentals had succeeded in subjugating the province. It might have meant that the development of this territory would have been advanced many years, because it is to be presumed that the American occupation would have been permanent. But the invasions did not succeed, and Florida continued to be a pawn of the European nations until Andrew Jackson's time.

THE END.

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